

I HAD THE *PRIVILEGE* OF KNOWING AN ANGEL


by Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFMCap

Giorgia left us on 16 July, a few months after she had reached the milestone of adulthood. She was born on 27 March 2005, Easter day, the Resurrection of Our Lord. I met her when she was only three years old, that is when she first began the long therapy in San Giovanni Rotondo, in our rehabilitation centre: "The Angels of Padre Pio," where they strove to alleviate the symptoms of Rett syndrome. This is a rare progressive neurological disease, which occurs after the first months of life, predominantly in female subjects, causing severe cognitive impairment, loss of motor and manual skills, and loss of interest in social interaction. They also call it the "beautiful-eye" syndrome, because those affected can only communicate with their eyes. Her mother, Angela, with great resolve chose to dedicate her life to her daughter, who was in need of very special attention and affection. San Giovanni Rotondo became for them their second home, just as our Shrine became for them the fount to their faith, hope, courage and strength to combat this little-known cruel enemy, that science has not yet been able to find a definite

cure. They fought together, relentlessly against all the limitations, let downs and complications without sparing themselves, or their time, sometimes travelling great distances to visit more qualified specialists, while Sabino, the father, stayed at home looking after Giorgia's younger brother and making sure that the family never lacked what was necessary to deal with the ordinary and extraordinary expenses. It was one of these "complications" that snatched her away from the embrace of her family, and she is now present to them in a spiritual way felt in a pure, perfect almost palpable love. Her presence in the places where Saint Pio of Pietrelcina lived and is now venerated, coincided with my time here as the Rector of the Shrine. We met and established a special friendship which always challenged my limited availability and time, but it was a bond that grew beyond mere proximity and the giving of comfort.

During her funeral, my memories of her passed before me and I realized how I had received so much more than what I offered through the ministry to which the Lord has called me. I received, and will always remember in my heart her testimony of life and faith

as well as that of her exemplary family. However, most of all I was able to see in her an angel "in the flesh," untouched by sin, and who through the sweet gaze of her eyes and suffering gave strength to my priesthood with all its everyday challenges, human difficulties and limitations.

Giorgia left us whilst the Church prayed and celebrated Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the feast day instituted to commemorate her apparition on 16 July 1251, to Saint Simon Stock, the Prior General of the Carmelite Order at the time, and gave him a scapular revealing to him the privileges connected with the devotion. Among them that of being freed from the pains of Purgatory. I am convinced that this "beautiful-eyed" girl was a favourite of Our Lady and protected by her motherly mantle. The graces from providence she received from the beginning to the end of her earthly life convince me that her share in Our Lord's passion and death, joined to the sacrifices of her family, made her ready for heaven. I am convinced that on that day many souls were freed from Purgatory and entered to their reward in paradise with her. 

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